

Conference Abstract

Green Pioneers: Raising awareness of invasive plants for all ages

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Abstract

When researchers and managers are asked to rank the issues that prevent adequate control of invasive species, lack of public awareness is at the top of the list (Dehnen-Schmutz et al. 2018). It is therefore imperative to raise the general public's awareness of the potential risks of introducing alien species into the wild.

Green Pioneers, a citizen science project funded by the Flemish Government, (Fig. 1) aims to address this issue in Belgium, across age groups.

The project aims to

- Create awareness on invasive species, highlighting how invasions can be avoided and how to mitigate their impact.
- Improve communication between citizens and scientists on conservation and invasive plant species.
- Augment the quality and quantity of data on invasive species.



Figure 1.

Logo of the Green pioneers project.

The project is developing three kinds of activity, specifically to attract a broad demographic:

- 'Young Pioneers', by developing tools for teachers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics for school children from 12-15 years old.
- 'Online Pioneers', through our online citizen science platform [DoeDat.be](https://doe-dat.be), by helping with the transcription of label information on herbarium specimens,
- and 'Visiteers', by inviting companies and working age people to help us in the collection and to inform them about invasive species.

Finally, we will be organizing a BioBlitz in spring 2020 at Meise Botanic Garden where we will celebrate plants and all our Green Pioneers, while also spreading the message of invasive plant awareness. During our 48 hour BioBlitz, scientists, volunteers and citizens are working together to survey the biodiversity of our Botanic Garden.

Ultimately, Green Pioneers aim to encourage recording of alien species by amateur botanists and create a generation of responsible gardeners who understand the consequences of releasing invasive alien plants into the wild.

Keywords

citizen science, BioBlitz, education, crowdsourcing, public awareness, visiteering, communication

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